

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION IN THE U. S. FOREST SERVICE

A Co-operative Study Sponsored Jointly  
by Region Four and the Utah State  
Agricultural College

by

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## . . . SUMMARY

This reports the findings of a study of Forest Service written communications made for the School of Forestry at the Utah State Agricultural College, and for Region Four of the United States Forest Service. The study was designed (1) to gather information that would help improve training given by the School of Forestry, and (2) to help the Forest Service plan in-service training programs in communication for its personnel. The investigator regarded the Service chiefly as a typical rather than a specific federal agency employing graduates of the Utah State Agricultural College.

Investigation showed a level of written communication that appeared generally adequate to the needs of the Service. Reports, memoranda, and correspondence were notably free from "federalese" and other occupational jargon. Suggestions made to individual offices for detailed improvements in report forms and correspondence were received favorably.

Investigation also revealed the great variety of communication activity necessarily carried on by personnel from the rank of District Ranger to Regional Forester. On the bases of observed needs and of suggestions by Service personnel, recommendations are made that should result in improved training for forestry students. These recommendations relate to school courses, an augmented testing program, and to student training activities. This report also notes several types of errors in written usage found rather widely, and gives suggestions for their correction.

## INTRODUCTION

Purposes

The purposes of the investigation here reported were chiefly two: (1) to provide the investigator with a sizeable body of information about Forest Service writing that should be useful in more effective teaching of English to students in the School of Forestry, and (2) to make recommendations to the Forest Service relative to content of proposed in-service training courses. It was understood mutually by the investigator and the Forest Service that this investigation was to regard the Forest Service merely as a typical federal employer; thus, the need for certain types of training in writing, as found in the communications studied, could be regarded as general among federal employers rather than as specific to the Forest Service. This point of view was deemed desirable since the U. S. A. C. School of Forestry trains its students for employment in a variety of federal agencies and private industries.

Scope

Investigation was conducted between July 1 and August 31, 1952. It included reading of the greatest possible number of reports, letters, memoranda, circulars, notices, and miscellaneous types of writing prepared by rangers, forest supervisors, and the staff of the Regional Forester of Region Four. Most of this work was done at Ogden in offices of the divisions of Fiscal Control, Engineering, Personnel Management, Recreation and Lands, Timber Management, Range and Wildlife Management, and Fire Control, which includes State Co-operation. Field work was done at the headquarters of the Fishlake National Forest and in district offices at Fish Lake and Salina.

Besides the reading recorded above, the investigation included interviews with supervisory and secretarial personnel, and with the editor and several other members of the staff of the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station.

Authorization

The general plan of the investigation was worked out co-operatively by Lewis M. Turner, Dean of the School of Forestry, Utah State Agricultural College; and Wendell M. Keck, Associate Professor of English, in April 1952. Arrangement was made in May by Dr. Wallace J. Vickers, head of the English Department, and Dr. John Carlisle, Dean of Summer School, to release Dr. Keck from teaching duty in the Summer Quarter and to transfer him to research status for that term. This arrangement was approved by Dean Carlton F. Culmsee of the School of Arts and Sciences and by President Louis L. Madsen. They also approved the arrangement whereby Dr. Keck would be paid his regular salary during Summer Quarter, and would be reimbursed by the Forest Service for travel and living expenses.

Objectives and procedure of the investigation were discussed in detail at a meeting in Logan on June 9. Present were Mr. K. D. Flock, of Washington, D. C.; Mr. Lester Moncrief and Mr. Fred Leftwich, both of Ogden; and Lewis M. Turner and Wendell M. Keck, both of the Utah State Agricultural College. Plans made at this meeting were discussed and confirmed by Dr. Keck and H. Dean Cochran at the Washington Office on June 17.

Prior to the beginning of the work in Ogden on July 1, the scope and purpose of the project had been explained in detail by Mr. Moncrief

to the Regional Forester and the Assistant Regional Foresters. On arrival of the investigator, they made available all files of typical reports and correspondence.

Acknowledgments

The investigator is under debt to all the personnel in the Ogden offices and to personnel in the offices of the Supervisor of the Fishlake National Forest for whole-hearted assistance. The helpfulness of all these persons is responsible for whatever success the investigation may claim.

## FINDINGS

The general level of writing observed in all offices was felt to be creditable. It was almost completely free from the "governmentese," "federalese," "gobbledegook," and other extensively publicized bad characteristics of the writing of federal agencies. Clear, direct statement was the rule, not the exception.

Reason for this favorable situation was not far to seek: personnel of all classifications proved to be genuinely and intelligently interested in effective expression of ideas. They showed unusual awareness of the importance of good writing, not only for letters, but for the varied internal communications of a large organization: memoranda, instructions, and informal reports. The term "communications" admittedly seemed to have certain magical power—it may have been somewhat oversold—but it was perfectly evident that secretarial personnel and the men from whom they take dictation are equally convinced that (1) only the best possible communication is desirable, and (2) improvement is always possible. When informed of the intent of the present investigation, personnel responded immediately with interest in improvement of their own work and in that of future Forest Service employees. This was only one evidence of the generally high morale observed throughout the organization.

Correspondence

Question had been raised as to whether certain files of lengthy contentious correspondence were the result of faulty expression by whatever member of the Forest Service had originated the correspondence or had made first answer to some letter. It was suggested that some of

this correspondence might have resulted from avoidable misunderstanding. Several of these files were examined rather critically. In none did it appear that the Forest Service writer had made statements that could be misunderstood reasonably. The "outsider" sometimes appeared to be guilty of attempting outright fraud; at other times the "misunderstanding," real or imaginary, appeared to be merely a face-saving technique.

There appeared to be general awareness of the truth that "anything that can be misunderstood will be," and a widespread effort to avoid making ambiguous or otherwise unclear statements. Situations that required exercise of more than usual tact appeared to be handled adequately; usually correspondence of this sort was reviewed carefully by more than one person in an effort to reduce to a minimum the possibility of misunderstanding. No evidence was seen of correspondence having an objectionably aggressive tone.

Without exception, the more effective letters and memoranda examined gave evidence of careful planning. Appearance of such planning seemed the more remarkable when one considered the volume of correspondence maintained by certain offices. A disposition to avoid letting any correspondence become strictly routine was evident in many offices: it is a healthy atmosphere. It is conducive to maintaining the personal touch that preserves morale within the organization and that makes and keeps friends from the outside.

Examination of a wide variety of reports and letters showed that the writing forester has occasion to use all the traditional "four forms of discourse," namely narration, description, explanation, and persuasion. College courses in English for students presumed to be training for technical careers have lately leaned toward emphasis on exposition to the near exclusion of narration and persuasion. A ranger making a report

of trespass is confronted essentially with a problem in narration; he faces the same problem in making an official report of an accident. In defending matters of policy and in gaining assent to regulations, he needs all possible skill in persuasion. Men in several offices stated emphatically that they wished they had had very much more training in persuasive writing and speaking.

As various individual problems in expression (chiefly letters from persons having real or fancied grievances against the Service) were examined and discussed, it became increasingly evident that effective communication depends upon something more than precision in diction and the mechanics of writing. This is not at all to minimize the importance of accuracy in these two matters, but should suggest that the forester's training in writing ideally should make accuracy automatic so that his conscious thought could be directed toward such important considerations as tone and manner.

#### Training manuals

Among the various types of writing examined, the training manuals consistently showed good workmanship. Expression was concise and clear, and it appeared that a person relatively unacquainted with the subject matter should be able to grasp it easily.

#### Uniformity of usage

In studying details of writing originating in a variety of offices, it was found that in such matters as punctuation and numeral usage there was noticeable lack of uniformity. It is felt that conformance with rules given in the Government Printing Office Style Manual would be desirable.

#### Specific criticisms

The remainder of this section attempts to show generally some of the

commoner deficiencies in written communication that were noted in files from several offices. The listing admittedly is incomplete, but it points to deficiencies that are conspicuous, and to weak spots that can be strengthened. The kinds of errors selected for review here are of a sort that could be discussed in an in-service training group. Many errors were observed and noted that are not listed here because they might easily be missed by persons not constantly engaged in criticism of manuscripts, and because it did not seem practical to list errors that occurred only infrequently.

First attention is called to strictly mechanical errors that are easily observable and demonstrable. It is felt that study of the sections on spelling and grammar, with their examples, may easily suggest to individuals the errors for which they should be alert. The section on "Rhetorical considerations" deals with problems of expression that may be less obvious but nonetheless real. It is hoped that the accompanying explanations reveal clearly the nature of these problems, and that the suggestions for their avoidance or solution will be found usable and practical. It is recognized that several points discussed in this section are essentially matters of occupational jargon; they may not lead to misunderstanding, but they are either illogical or inaccurate, and therefore should be remedied.

The examples are all verbatim quotations except that some personal and geographical names have been altered.

#### Spelling

Among the mechanical problems in writing that need constant observation, spelling takes high rank. Inaccurate spelling usually results in either or both of two unfavorable consequences: (1) misunderstanding

(usually by correctly spelling the wrong word correctly—as in writing effect when affect obviously is intended); and (2) creating in the reader an impression of carelessness on the part of the writer (as in the above example or in writing seperate for separate). Words and phrases shown in the following list contained errors in spelling when they appeared in letters, memoranda, and reports.

to ( for <u>too</u> )	first-hand (adj.)
ie. (for i.e.)	affect for effect, and <u>vice versa</u>
it's (for its)	8 days' work
consensus	30 years' experience
occurred	each other's problems
visibility	an 11-man outfit
similar	each agency's (not agencies') personnel
exonerated	four-year (or 4-year) period
inasmuch	<u>principal</u> for principle
susceptible	specie for species
prevalent	a six- to eight-week period
meager	a 12-minute film
nonuse	a three- or four-day period
sublease	5- and 10-man outfits
judgment	June <u>one</u> for June 1.

This list is by no means complete, but it records actual and typical errors, each of which appeared in the files of several divisions.

As guides to precise usage, the Webster New Collegiate Dictionary and the Government Printing Office Style Manual (Abridged) are strongly recommended for desk use. The Style Manual has valuable sections on capitalization, spelling, compounding, and abbreviations.

#### Grammar

The chief concern of grammar is correctness of the mechanical form of expression. The total body of writing examined showed a generally satisfactory standard of grammatical usage. A few types of error that were generally recurrent are noted here for observation and warning.

Reference of Pronouns. The old rule of singular pronouns with singular nouns, and plurals with plurals, must be observed for accurate, clear communication. Trouble is most likely to come when reference is from a

pronoun in one sentence to a noun in the preceding sentence, but faulty reference may occur within a sentence. The examples following should suffice for illustration.

Generally the forest safety officer can do this. They should satisfy themselves that all planes are completely inspected.

In the event you have any question regarding this supplemental fee please advise and we will attempt to answer them to your satisfaction. (Besides containing this error in grammar, the sentence is somewhat wordy and stilted. Why not say: If you have any question about the supplemental fee, let us know and we shall try to answer it satisfactorily.)

On contacting Mr. Blank, he stated that he had leased the range for fall grazing. (Who made the statement, and who did the leasing?)

Agreement of Subject and Verb. A second grammatical principle that requires rigid observance is the rule that singular forms of verbs are used with singular subjects, and plural forms with plural subjects (or singular subjects joined by and). This principle has been violated in the following sentences. This error is very likely to occur in sentences in which the verb precedes the subject, and in sentences opening with "There is."

There is 110 merchantable trees per acre.  
Revised: The area averages 110 merchantable trees per acre.

Each of them were handled by a crew of 5 men.  
Revised: Each was handled by a 5-man crew. (Why use 11 words when 7 can do the work?)  
and there was some worthwhile discussions held on some difficult subjects.  
Revised: . . . and very worthwhile discussions were held on several difficult subjects.

We note that a copy of inspection forms were not submitted for several days.

Revised: We note that inspection forms were not submitted . . . or . . . We note that a copy of the inspection forms was not . . . or . . . We note that no copy of the inspection forms was . . .

Indefinite Reference. Loose or indefinite reference of such relative words as which and this is to be avoided. That is, these words should

refer back to a specific word, not to the content of a whole sentence.

The forces are largely seasonal and the turnover is high, which

requires reorganization and training annually.

Revised: Since the forces are largely seasonal and show high turnover, annual reorganization and training are necessary. (Note that the revised sentence emphasizes the cause-effect relationship that is implicit in the sentence.)

Dangling Constructions. A modifier (usually a phrase, most frequently a participial phrase) is said to "dangle" when it appears to modify some work in its sentence, but actually does not. The classic textbook example is: "Walking down the road, a large red barn came into view." This old bromide is no whit better as an example than the following sentences culled from assorted files.

Based on past experience we are planning revision of the Regional policy. (Doubtless the revision is to be "based on past experience," but the sentence says "we" are.)

Computed at current grazing fees for this area, 64 cents per cow month amounts to \$6.40. (in other words, a dime equals a dollar! Has deflation really set in?)

Based upon this examination I am of the opinion that both the driver of the Government vehicle and the driver of the private vehicle were negligent in the operation of the respective vehicles. (Really, the author is not "based upon this examination," even though the sentence says he is.)

Having taken one examination and passing same, it is not the policy to require these examinations to be taken annually. (The sentence indicates that either it or a policy has taken an examination and passed it. Why not just: If an employee has passed a driver's examination, we do not expect him to be re-tested annually.)

The following sentence not only opens with a dangling phrase, but it contains an error in pronoun reference.

When forwarding requisitions, the Dean should be given sufficient detailed information concerning the jobs to be filled to enable them to make their selections. (From context, if not from the sentence itself, it was evident that them and their at the end referred to deans.) Several revisions are possible; here is a sample: When forwarding requisitions to deans, you should give

sufficiently detailed information concerning the jobs to be filled so that they can make their selections.

Split Constructions. The construction most frequently "split" is the infinitive phrase; the "splitting" is usually done by inserting an adverb between to and the infinitive form of the verb. There is no wish here to be or even to seem pedantic; but best usage still dictates usually placing the modifying word after the infinitive or after its object.

Try reading the following "splits" aloud, and then see where is a better place for each adverb:

it will be necessary for you to again take the driver's test

which would require him to personally assume liability

was unable to completely stop

no road measurements were made to definitely establish the positions of the two cars.

It is only good business to thus have the man so situated that he can be quickly placed on his station or taken off on other work, as conditions provide. (Omit thus; change provide to necessitate.)

Summary. The foregoing sections indicate the types of grammatical error found most frequently, and should suggest the content and direction that should be taken in any contemplated in-service training program.

### Rhetoric

Rhetoric is concerned chiefly with effectiveness of expression.

Hence, the criticisms presented in the following sections are aimed primarily at producing effective expression rather than merely accurate statement.

Logic of Sentence. Unfortunately, in the hurry of dictation, it is easy for one to lose the direction of his thought and to produce a sentence that lacks either logical content or logical structure. Logical

structure was missed in this sentence:

I certainly enjoyed your letter of April 24, and to get some of your viewpoints which you outlined there.

Probably the writer meant something like:

I certainly enjoyed your letter of April 24, which clearly outlined some of your viewpoints.

In the following fragment, the word over upsets the logic of the statement:

... on a somewhat reduced scale over that contemplated when plans were prepared

If we change to "on a scale reduced somewhat from what was contemplated," the meaning is unmistakeable.

In the following sentence, the dictator apparently forgot what had been the subject of his first statement by the time he arrived at must:

The current use of the area by over 570,000 people annually has greatly increased the fire risk and must be met.

Probably some demand for use had to be met--not use itself.

The longer the sentence, the easier it is to lose the logic of its meaning and structure. Meaning of the following 41-word wonder is obscured partially by its sheer length; partly by having the indefinite it for subject.

In order to expedite clearance of title and payment for the land, it will be appreciated if you will promptly lend us your Abstract of Title or any other title evidence you may have for the review of our Regional Attorney.

Several revisions are possible; the following is suggested:

We would appreciate it if you would promptly loan us your Abstract of Title, or any other title evidence you may have, for review by our Regional Attorney. This would expedite both clearance of title and payment for the land.

Order. To effect clarity, it is necessary to have modifying elements placed near the words or phrases they are supposed to modify. Also, it is usually desirable to have the subject-verb-complement core of a

sentence disturbed as little as possible. These principles were not observed uniformly in the following quoted items:

The lease is up on the house I am renting in about 30 days.

Organization in many instances to get the job done can be improved.

During the past grazing season, we have all watched the range management plan for the Brown's Hole Cattle Allotment outlined last spring at the association meeting develop with great interest.

The supervisor made a trip to Yoyo to discuss the situation on December 4. (Did the supervisor make his trip on December 4? Did he have the discussion on December 4? Or did he make his trip in order to discuss a set of conditions that existed on December 4?)

Usually sentences of this sort can be detected by oral reading when they are likely to be missed in silent reading.

The "There is" sentence. No grammatical principle is violated by opening a sentence with "There is" in any of its forms, or by having this expression as the core of a statement. The objections that may be raised against this pattern of sentence are that: (1) it usually (and illogically) puts the predication in a subordinate clause, and (2) it usually is unnecessarily wordy. Following are a few typical "There is" sentences and possible revisions. It will be noted that all the revised sentences are shorter than the originals, and that no idea contained in the original sentence is cut out by the revision.

There are several things yet that should be done.

Revised: Several things still should be done.

In Utah, for example, there are more than 200 municipalities and villages that are directly affected by the condition of the watershed above them.

Revised: In Utah, for example, more than 200 municipalities and villages are directly affected by the condition of the watershed above them. (In the original, the main statement is merely that more than 200 municipalities and villages exist; in the revision, the statement is that these communities "are directly affected"; the latter is obviously the idea that the writer intended to convey.)

There are certain privately owned lands which are of outstanding public importance; and which for restoration, resource development and management reasons should be publicly owned.

Revised: Certain privately owned lands are of outstanding public importance; for restoration, resource development, and management reasons, they should be publicly owned.

There may be an exceptional case in which you would require a permittee to obtain liability insurance. (17 words)

Revised: Only in an exceptional case would you require a permittee to obtain liability insurance. (14 words)

Or: Only rarely would you require a permittee to obtain liability insurance. (11 words)

There are three important municipal watersheds on the Blank district that require a great deal of attention. (Faulty subordination)

The three important municipal watersheds on Blank district all require considerable attention.

Parallel Structure. Essentially, parallel structure is the writing of two or more sentence elements that perform the same function in the same type of construction, such as noun clauses, infinitive phrases, or gerund phrases. Parallel structure is a rhetorical device that increases clarity and gains emphasis at the same time. However, if the parallelism is not accurate, the sentence structure and meaning become confused, and the potential emphasis is lost. In the following sentence, the parallel structure is not consistent; the reader has to back-track to get the intent of the sentence.

It offers opportunity to park cars, trucks and handle stores without congestion.

Revised: It offers opportunity to park cars and trucks, and to handle stores without congestion.

In the following sentence, the parallel structure is accurate enough, but the last element needlessly appears to be an unimportant after thought.

He said that he would require that fertile top soil be preserved for replacement to restore cover and to prevent erosion, also to remove hazards.

Revised: He said he would require that fertile top soil be preserved for replacement to restore cover, to prevent erosion, and to remove hazards.

Shifting Point of View. Usually we expect a single sentence to talk about one subject or topic. Also, we expect the verbs to indicate

action in the same time or tense, or in a logical sequence of tenses; likewise, we expect them to be consistently "active" (subject performs action) or "passive" (subject is receiver of action). Departure from any of these three types of consistent expression is called a shift in point of view. In the following sentence, the point of view shifts from we to which (referring to movies), to time, to he; besides, the pronoun this has no reference word. The revised form is a bit longer than the original, but is considerably clearer.

We have available a number of movies of how to handle fire situations which are quite instructive, and if there were some time at the meeting following a luncheon or some other time he would be glad to make arrangements to do this.

Revised: We have available several quite instructive movies of how to handle fire situations. If there were some time at the meeting, following a luncheon possibly, Jones would be glad to make arrangements to show one or more of them.

What are the subjects in the following sentences? How can you regularize the structure of these sentences to make them clear?

During recent years, excelsior, box lumber, and match sticks have been made from aspen and has been very satisfactory. (What has been satisfactory?)

It is recognized that positive action for closure or other restriction can be taken only in certain areas, and generally forest officers can act only in an advisory capacity, but his position relative to the hazards of the situation should be clearly stated and well publicized where it is in the public interest to do so.

In the event of a heavy lightning concentration, we will undoubtedly be short of suppression forces, but this has been encountered many times in the past, and by judicious use of all known factors and knowledge and experience we have, maybe we can sort out the most dangerous fires and get them under control first.

This list could be lengthened, but the examples given above should indicate how constant and aimless shifting of point of view decreases clarity and effectiveness of expression.

Summary. The foregoing sections should show that a sentence that

contains no errors in grammar may still be ineffective in expression. It should be noted that a clear sentence usually is an emphatic sentence.

### Diction

Under this heading come such matters as accurate choice of words, jargon, and some notes on overuse and misuse of certain words.

Among the individual words and phrases that merit special study to insure accurate usage are those shown below. Inaccurate usage (usually of words in the left-hand column) usually results from inaccurate understanding of the meaning of the word.

advise	inform; notify; tell
appreciate	understand
which	that
party	person
people	persons
infer	imply
over	more than (with expressions of number)
particularly	especially
although	but; while
in case	if

One of the best guides to good usage, especially for personnel in federal offices, is George McLane Wood's bulletin of instructions for persons preparing papers for the U. S. Geological Survey. Study of the section on individual words is recommended for every person who prepares or supervises correspondence.

Related to the problem of correct usage noted above is that of a sort of occupational jargon. It occurs frequently in letters and memos, but sometimes appears in more formal writing, such as reports. It often appears to be a carry-over from the stiff, stilted tone that was considered correct in business correspondence forty or more years ago. Typical of these expressions is the letter opening: "We are in receipt of a letter . . ." (How can "we" get into a condition of "receipt"?) The opening "Your letter of October 12 indicates that . . ." not only

tells that the letter has been received and read, but it gets immediately to the heart of the business of the present letter. The three-word phrase take into consideration means only consider; and at the present time means nothing more than at present, or now, or, more emphatically, immediately. Why require a reader to respond to four words when his response to just one serves our purpose?

In connection with jargon, special attention should be given to the word case, which is misapplied more frequently than it is used rightly. The phrase in case, like case alone, is used to mean so many different things that it virtually means nothing. None of the examples of rather vague use of case gleaned from Forest Service files showed quite the futility of a sentence written by a student in chemistry: "In the case of magnesium sulphate, this was not the case." Of course he meant merely: "This was not true for magnesium sulphate." The suggested revisions for the following sentences should indicate how misuse or overuse of case has robbed it of precise meaning.

In many cases the intangible values are greater.  
(For "In many cases" substitute "Often" or "frequently.")

In many cases the general instructions in the Fire Handbook are sufficient for those employees who have only general responsibilities. (What does "In many cases" mean? Often? Usually? Nearly always? or perhaps "On many fires"?)

... should be used only in those cases where the owner is known. (Try: "should be used only when the owner is known")

Inspection indicates such to be the case.  
(By now you should be thoroughly suspicious of case, and you may reasonably wonder what such is. Probably: "Inspection proves (or possibly only suggests) that this condition exists.")

What has happened to case has befallen nature and character, though to a much less marked degree.

Sometimes a matter of logic is involved in word usage just as in sentence structure. One report included the startling sentence: "Much

of the area is very inaccessible." If the area really is inaccessible, what business has very in the sentence?

#### Punctuation

Punctuation was found to be uniformly adequate except in one detail,

Time after time, the question mark that should have been placed at the

end of a direct question was not there. In some matters of disputable

usage (such as the use of a comma before and in a series of three or

more items), it is felt that it would be desirable for all offices to

conform to the style prescribed in the Style Manual of the Government

Printing Office.

#### Numerical usage

Without doubt the matter of numeral usage is one of the most vexing

of all the problems in written communication. Probably the most

complete set of directions on numeral usage is that given in the Style

Manual, but at points these directions become puzzling. The directions

given in such publications as the Reference Manual for Stenographers and

Typists by Gavin and Hutchinson, or in the Stenographer's Reference

Manual by Larsen and Koebel, are generally clear and otherwise

satisfactory.

## LETTERS

It is hardly within the province of a report such as this to go into a discussion of techniques of effective business correspondence. The Forest Service necessarily makes and maintains many important contacts by letter, and the importance of effective correspondence is recognized throughout the organization. After reading considerable correspondence, one is prompted to suggest that business be transacted orally whenever possible, and that a letter should be used only when necessitous circumstances make it imperative. This suggestion is not intended as a hint that Service personnel do not prepare good letters; on the contrary, many of the letters originating in the Service seemed to be very well prepared.

For the benefit of personnel unable to take the in-service training course prepared by Information and Education, it is suggested that study of any of the textbooks by Dr. R. A. Aurner would be extremely rewarding. An important point in Dr. Aurner's philosophy is that every business letter is in fact a sales letter. It may not be attempting to sell merchandise, but it may be working to gain assent to some policy, or it may be asking for employment. In this connection, Dr. Aurner notes that effective sales letters nearly always close with a request for some specific action by the receiver. Use of this suggestion will put pointed punch into the close of many a letter, and will mean the difference between getting a positive response and getting no response at all.

It should hardly be necessary to emphasize the fact that business letters should be as short as possible. Few business persons care to

read a letter longer than one page. Occasionally, though, it is necessary to send a three-page affair. When a letter runs to this length, it is especially important to use some device at the close that will tie together the numerous details that have preceded. The longer the letter, the more important it is to try to leave some unified impression on the reader. To this end, it is suggested that use of the following expressions may be helpful:

"In short, then, it appears to us that . . . ."

"Our next move will be to . . . ."

"Please (here indicate the kind of action you desire) immediately!"

Dr. Aurner states that the general pattern of a "sales" letter of any sort is designed to get the reader's attention, interest, desire, and action; and that this is the order in which the good letter tries to evoke these responses. Careful reading and analysis of any number of good sales letters show that professional writers follow this plan with amazing consistency. Many Service letters could be improved merely by changing the order of certain paragraphs to conform with this suggested pattern.

## MISCELLANEOUS

It may seem that this investigator has been rather unorthodox in concluding a report of this nature and length without a section entitled "Recommendations." Review of the report thus far will show that recommendations have been given directly in connection with matters that seemed to need improvement. However, the list of points to be suggested has not been exhausted. Some of them still seem pertinent in the perspective gained by a three months' absence from the concentrated reading; so they are given herewith.

1. It is felt that many offices would benefit by providing their stenographers with the current Webster New Collegiate Dictionary for desk use. Many offices had no dictionary more recent than the 4th edition of the Collegiate, and that is now quite out-dated. The abridged edition of the Government Printing Office Style Manual is a reputable guide in many matters of style, such as punctuation, spelling, etc.

2. Certain forms in reports could be improved and simplified. Especially noted is the form for the table of contents (on some reports incorrectly designated as Index). The column showing paging could be simplified by indicating only the page on which a section or division begins. Leader lines from topics to the "page" column could be lightened by dotting only alternate spaces or every third space; so doing would emphasize the two important columns. Dots should be aligned vertically, and a clear space at the left of the column of page numbers is desirable; it should be from  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch to  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch wide. In underlining titles and other topical material, better emphasis is gained by under-scoring words

only; spaces and punctuation marks should not be underlined.

3. In connection with the Region's excellent safety program, it is suggested that some instruction be disseminated on the "who-what-how" technique of reporting accidents. Some of the narrative reports of accidents were well written, but some missed the point of showing the relationships between drivers and occurrences. It is also suggested that some information be given out about certain legal matters. For example, it appeared from many reports that drivers were unaware of what actions (or lack of them) made them liable to a charge of contributory negligence. Often it appeared that a very simple action on the part of the Forest Service driver would have saved him from being liable to this charge; also, it would have enabled the Service to collect more in damages from outsiders involved in these accidents. However, the safety campaign may be so effective by the end of this year that there will be no accidents or accident reports in 1953!

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In assessing the values of this study, it becomes apparent that some--perhaps the most important--are somewhat intangible. It is also apparent that the full force of others may not be realized immediately. However, the accomplishments listed below are believed to be tangible, and their results should be apparent immediately and in the very near future.

1. This study gave the investigator familiarity with types of writing problems typical of federal agencies, especially the Forest Service and agencies having somewhat similar objectives and problems. This acquaintance with actual writing problems has resulted in recommendations to the U. S. A. C. School of Forestry and to the Department of English for the more effective training of students for their presumed eventual employment.

2. This study gave the investigator familiarity with the organization and operation of the Forest Service that will prove useful in helping him understand problems of students of forestry. It will enable him to give more informed and effective counsel, and will enable him to give much more effective teaching of writing.

3. This study effected sharp realization of the variety of demands on the practicing forester that should be met by his school training. This item is reflected in the "Recommendations" section of the report submitted to the Utah State Agricultural College. (See the Appendix to this report.)

4. This investigation has effectuated highly desirable public relations between the College and Region Four. Specifically this is shown, at least in part, by the following three items:

- a. The recent visit on the campus by Mr. Joel Walters, editor for the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, who addressed the class in Technical Writing on the problems of publishing research.
- b. The offer of help by the Messrs. Moncrief and Hedges in putting on an interviewing clinic designed to demonstrate effective interviewing techniques. This project should be very helpful to senior and graduate students seeking employment.
- c. The increased interest of Region Four in the training program given by the U. S. A. C. School of Forestry. This project has demonstrated to officials of Region Four the

College's serious intent to give superior training to its students in forestry.

5. Special assistance was given individual offices, as follows:
  - a. Suggestions were given to Fiscal Control for improvement of the form of their standard reports of office inspection.
  - b. Suggestions were given to Information and Education for content and organization of an in-service training program in business letter writing.
  - c. On request, the investigator assisted in preparation of varied correspondence from several offices. This counsel was supplemented by the loan of books from his personal library and the U. S. A. C. Library.

A P P E N D I X

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COLLEGE  
(Excerpt from report to USAC)

Sources

The recommendations given herein have come from a variety of sources. Some result from observed inadequacies in writing. Several were made directly or casually by miscellaneous personnel on bases of observation and realized personal needs. Still others are the result of direct conference with supervisory personnel. Some, admittedly, result solely from the present investigator's attempts to think through the obvious needs of Forest Service personnel and to find means of meeting these needs or of preventing their occurrence.

Some of the recommendations are made without accompanying directions or suggestions for their being carried out. It is felt that observation of the need is of primary importance; that some in-service discussion is desirable; that if the Service agrees that the need is real, means will be found for filling it.

School projects

A widely recognized weakness in the present school training program for foresters is the discontinuity of training in the varied types of communication that the future forester will have to use. Also recognized is the fact that usually the school administrator has no sort of continuous record of a student's progress in this part of his training. For that matter, how many individual student advisers have such a record? The desirability, if not downright necessity, for such a record of continuous development seems obvious especially when a school does not have a four-year continuous training schedule.

Attention is called to the fact that some technical schools (e. g.,

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) are now working toward a four-year continuous training program in English and related studies. It is suggested that study be made of such programs to see what might be usable by the School of Forestry, either by itself or in collaboration with outside departments.

Testing. Inasmuch as the Forest Service itself recognizes the value of various sorts of inspection at fairly regular intervals, it is suggested that the School of Forestry plan and establish a testing program that will keep the student and his advisers informed of his progress in training in expression. Grades in separate courses often are not very reliable predictors of an individual's performance in solving a problem. Accordingly, it is suggested that the following testing program be instituted as a school practice. It should be given independently of any classes in English. It should be given in addition to entrance and aptitude tests now given.

1. In Fall Quarter of the freshman year, give all freshmen a test for reading ability, such as the Nelson-Denny, Iowa Silent Reading, or a comparable test. At the beginning of each student's junior year, re-test him with the same test or an alternate form of it to get some measure of practical progress he has made during two years of school.
2. When each student is halfway through his four-year course, give a re-test on the A. C. E. test he took at entrance to college. Note apparent advance or regression of facility in writing, and recommend accordingly.
3. Give a test on applied writing ability not later than the first quarter of the student's senior year. Have it graded on definitely established standards for spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and prescribe help for those who need it. In this connection, it is suggested that some inquiry be made into the work of "writing clinics" established on some campuses (e. g., Dartmouth, Cornell) to see whether similar service could be given on our own campus.

Courses. It is assumed that the present program of courses in English composition, or an equivalent program, will be maintained by the College

and required by the School of Forestry. After careful consideration of the wide scope of a forester's communication activities, it seems wise to recommend supplementary course work in the following subjects:

1. Public Relations. Such a course should give the student basic training in the techniques of meeting the public in person, by letter, and through the press and related media. The Service constantly has a "selling" job to be done, and some familiarity with the do's and dont's of effective public relations technique would be invaluable to the man entering either public or private employment. This training should include practical exercises in letter-writing, especially in the writing of letters that require more than usual need for the use of judgment and tact.
2. Office Work. From many sources--especially from men in the field--comes insistence that the prospective forester should have training in use of the typewriter. Another phase of office work for which men need training is dictation of letters, memoranda, and related forms of written communication. Poor technique in dictation results in frayed nerves, personnel friction, and unbelievably large losses of time (not to mention the average minimum cost of 75¢ for a business letter!); much of this loss is avoidable.
3. Oral communication. Since administrators frequently are faced with the necessity of giving oral reports, it is recommended that seminar and other class reports be evaluated partly on the basis of how they sound. Even a report containing considerable statistical material can be made not only palatable but interesting. It is urged that attention be given to effective oral reporting techniques.

#### Miscellaneous projects

1. Parliamentary Procedure. Men in the field frequently are expected to assist in the conduct of more or less public business meetings. It is highly desirable that foresters have some accurate knowledge of the content of Roberts' Rules of Order.
2. Interviewing. Since many seniors have not had the experience of being interviewed, it is recommended that some activity be undertaken that will give them this experience. It is suggested that some means be devised for giving them instruction in effective interview procedure. Region Four is currently disposed to give the College effective help by putting on an interview demonstration on the campus in connection with regular recruitment procedure, provided that faculty and students in the School of Forestry give the necessary assistance and co-operation. In this connection it may be noted that assistance in preparation of letters of application is available from the English Department.
3. Professional Readings. It is recommended that some project be devised to insure that students become familiar with current

literature in Forestry. It is felt that this reading project should operate outside the framework of English classes so that students will feel that this reading is a professional activity rather than the mere fulfilling of an assignment.

4. Award for Proficiency. It is recommended that consideration be given to the idea of giving some sort of award, probably annually, for proficiency in communication. It is felt that the award should be made on the basis of performance observed by the faculty rather than on the basis of grades in courses in English and Speech,
5. Photography. Since the Service is making increasing use of photographs in a variety of types of reports, it is recommended that students be urged to acquire some practical experience in use of a camera. This experience might be gained by taking a course in photography. An alternative would be the formation of a foresters' camera club open to both students and faculty who might be interested. Such an organization could greatly stimulate student self-help in this training. Occasional exhibits of the club's work would be interesting and instructive, and would stimulate interest within the School and from other parts of the campus.
6. Faculty Co-operation. It is recommended that the faculty of the School of Forestry refuse to accept papers that do not satisfy certain definitely accepted standards of accuracy in writing. Refusal to accept and read a sub-standard paper will do more to impress a student with the necessity for producing accurate writing than merely giving a grade lowered because of poor writing. It is recognized that this practice is likely to cause some inconvenience, but it will show the student body in short order that the School is in earnest in the matter of its graduates' being able to write as befits college men. It is believed that this practice will result in the production of graduates who can demand and who will receive prime consideration in a competitive labor market.
7. Library. It is recommended that the Forestry Library make available for reference and self-help the following publications:
  - Correspondence Style Manual. U. S. Dept. Agr. Office of Personnel, Division of Training, Adm. Ser. #2. Rev. ed. 1949  
(Has a good collection of useful illustrations.)
  - Easier Typing. U. S. Dept. Agr. Adm. Ser #1. 1933 (Illustrated instructions on typing; care of typewriter. Valuable for students who cannot schedule a course in typewriting.)
  - Reference Manual for Stenographers and Typists by Ruth E. Gavin and E. Lillian Hutchinson. New York: Gregg Publishing Co., 1951.
  - Stenographer's Reference Manual. 3rd ed. by Lenna A. Larsen and Apollonia M. Koebele. Cincinnati: South-Western Publishing Co., 1949.
  - Writing Effective U. S. D. A. Letters. U. S. Dept. Agr. Office of Personnel, Division of Training, n. d.